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THE SUBSTANCE

OF

Mr. WARD's SPEECH

AT THE

TOWN-HALL *in* SHEFFIELD,

On Wednesday, April 6th, 1791,

At a Meeting of the Inhabitants who attended in Pursuance of an Advertisement inserted in the Sheffield Papers,

TO GIVE THEIR

ASSENT OR DISSENT TO,

THE BILL

FOR

The proposed New WORKHOUSE.

THE SUBSTANCE

MR. ARD ST. BECK

TOWN HALL SHEPHERD

On a copy of the 17th

in the year of our Lord

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PREFACE.

HAVING seldom attended town's-meetings, I had not bestowed a thought on the subject, neither was it designedly mentioned to me by any one. A stranger called upon me on business on Wednesday morning, and in conversation mentioned "*the ferment the Sick Clubs were in,*" relative to the meeting at the Town-Hall, on the New Workhouse Bill; and gave it as his opinion, that it might, if passed, materially affect the prosperity of those benevolent Societies. A Gentleman justly observes, in a recent publication on this subject,* "who can be ignorant how public business is generally transacted? For, though every legal inhabitant is interested in a case of this nature, yet many decline attendance on these occasions from a consciousness of their ignorance; others out of regard to their own private affairs; others for fear of subjecting themselves to being appointed to offices which they wish to avoid; and great numbers because they 'care for none of these things,' till they perceive a burthen approaching which is likely to sit heavy on their shoulders. So that most points which are held out for public discussion are generally carried by a few individuals who have interested themselves in the accomplishment." And, should an inhabitant, one who is a stranger to the business, venture to attend, and casually differ in opinion, how is he in danger of being treated?—Perhaps overawed by one part of his opponents, and probably insulted by the other.

It has ever been, and will continue to be the case till the end of time, that in every town there will be a number of Poor who want relief; a small part of the community, who owe their existence to the benevolence of the greater. But does it follow, that, because a few shillings are solicited by an object in distress, or a family under the pressure of sickness or misfortune, to relieve the

* A paper inserted in the Sheffield Advertiser of the 11th of March 1791, under the signature of Calophilus.

the necessities of the moment; I say, does it follow that we are to wreak vengeance both on them and ourselves, by maintaining in the Workhouse each individual of the family at the rate of 3s. 6d. a head?—especially considering that it is very doubtful whether the profits of their labour would be half sufficient for their maintenance.

In my opinion, a spirit of independence should be cherished in the lower orders of society; the contrary sentiments must be the consequence of immuring them in the Workhouse: for, as the Gentleman I have just quoted farther observes, “the mind, in such cases, will be apt to grow abject and spiritless; and a man, after being reduced to a level with the lowest paupers, will grow indisposed to exert his faculties for self-support. Accordingly, if whole families are forced into the House for want of a little temporary relief, the consciousness of having lost their respectability, by being thus thrown upon the public, will be apt to create in them a slavish indifference to esteem, and injure the best interests of society.” A conduct highly disapproved of by the humane Mr. Howard, who says, “I by no means approve of the idea of parishes giving no relief out of Workhouses.”

Impressed with these sentiments, and having a full conviction on my mind of their being consistent with Reason, Humanity, and Economy, I accepted the invitation that the Advertisement held forth to the inhabitants in common, without actually knowing any person in particular who would attend; without having any knowledge of the Bill; and without previously communicating to any one my opinion. What observations I was induced to make on the business were written at the Town-Hall, under the eye of all present, during the time the Bill was reading; and from these short notes I addressed the Meeting.

As what I then spoke has, by some of the disappointed been much misrepresented, I beg leave to lay before the public the following Narrative; and, having thus submitted my observations to the Public, I shall not make any farther reply to whatever may be written or said upon this subject hereafter.

W. WARD.

A paper inserted in the Sheffield Advertiser of the 11th of March 1841, under the signature of C. Chapman.

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THE SUBSTANCE

OF

Mr. WARD's SPEECH, &c.

WHEN I took my place in the TOWN-HALL, on the 6th of April, 1791, I addressed the Chairman, and asked "If the Bill for a New Work-house would be openly discussed? and whether, if the sense of the then crowded Hall was against it, there would be an end of it?" ^a To which I understood he replied in the affirmative.

The Bill was then read over. After which the Chairman read a motion, proposed by Dr Browne, and seconded by Mr. Eyre, for a question "Whether the Bill before recited was agreeable to the resolutions passed at the meeting in December last?" This motion he urged repeatedly; and I as repeatedly called him to the business of the day, agreeable to the Committee's advertisement ^{then}

^a The author of Facts and Observations, page 20, says, "The subject is precluded from being discussed at a proposed future meeting."

then before the town, viz. " for the inhabitants to give their assent or dissent to the Bill."

I claimed his promise, and my right to discuss the Bill --- which, by perseverance, I was not afraid of obtaining. I considered the late proceedings in this affair as arbitrary; for, as the meeting of the 10th of December, consisted of few but the Committee, " could they be supposed to be the sense of 30,000 inhabitants? The House of Commons did not choose to proceed on business, unless there were together present 40 members out of 558; but a few here attempted to burthen 30,000 with what they themselves would not touch with their little finger. Who did they consist of? Chiefly gentlemen of the Faculty, Law and Divinity; who when called upon, refused public offices. They were too much engaged." These and other such menial offices, were the care of others, " whom they now wish to preclude from discussing this Bill."

" But I doubt not of being candidly attended to in my reply to such proceedings. I do not mean, however, to cast any reflections upon the rectitude of the intentions of any of those who are concerned in this affair. I look upon them as men of theory, actuated by the best motives, but strangers to business.

" Their account of the Shrewsbury House is not explicit, they do not acquaint us that it was originally built for a Foundling Hospital, that there

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is some land belonging to it, and that by several parishes being unitedly concerned in the present establishment the number of expensive superintendants is probably diminished. So that Sheffield, by attempting to imitate Shrewsbury, would, by multiplying officers and buildings, be probably drawn into an annual increase of expence of some poor books without any prospect of profit."

"That this is no fanciful supposition will be evident to those who consider the 8000*l.* which is to be borrowed, and whatever sum is further wanted, the expence of obtaining the act, purchase of tenant right, erecting the house, ground rent, furnishing the house, salaries of the governor, deputy, superintendants, clerks, &c. implements and materials for the manufactory.

But, exclusive of a regard to Humanity, this scheme is not defensible upon prudential consideration in Sheffield; because there is such a spirit of independence prevails amongst the journeymen manufacturers here, as in a great measure renders the attempt unnecessary, as it would be ineffectual. Witness their Benevolent Societies, which pay annually to their sick members the amount of the poor rates; ^b besides the numerous weekly collections which are made in the workshops and at the grinding-wheels for the relief of such as are reduced to half-pay, or labour under peculiar necessities

^b In Sheffield are 55 Sick Clubs; the yearly sums paid in relief of their brethren exceed 3500*l.*—In 1788 a particular account was published; by which it appeared that the aggregate sum paid by these Societies, from their annual feast in 1786, to the same in 1787, was 3519*l.* 10*s.*

necessities. And as those who are capable of labour are seldom long in want of employment—and, so long as they are able, look only to Heaven and their own hands for support---why should we not encourage our own flourishing manufactory, in preference to another to which we are strangers? This, surely, would be much more beneficial to the community than the cloathing, feeding, and physicking thousands in a Workhouse.

Shrewsbury might be burthened with people brought up in inactive servitude. We are a people of industry from early periods of life, and are not afraid of appearing before *men*. Whilst, in some towns, their inhabitants pass not only childhood and youth, but manhood, in inactivity, dissipation and *dependence*.

Shrewsbury, like some other genteel towns, may abound more with gentlemen's families than manufactories. If so, this rather accounts for their Poor being numerous.

-c In 1783 the Disbursements at Shrewsbury (a Gentleman writes) on account of the Poor, were 4605l. 3s. 9½d.—In 1783 the Poor Rates in Sheffield amounted to 2741l. 7s. 3d.—And I am told (but cannot vouch for the truth of it) that at the above period the inhabitants of Sheffield were 30,000, and those of Shrewsbury supposed to be 20,000. What the increase of population in Sheffield has been since 1783 will appear best from the Registers of the several Churches and Chapels.—That of Shrewsbury may be known by any one who will take the trouble of enquiring.

IN SHEFFIELD:

In the Year	Burials.	Marriages.	Births.
1784	819	443	1258
1785	1164	438	1312
1786	1043	391	1522
1787	843	398	1473
1788	1045	386	1540
1789	879	423	1590
1790	1324	424	1543

I am not hostile to any useful measure; nor, during 34 years, have I been at three public town meetings; or given my opinion, when I staid away, to obstruct the well-meant endeavours and plans of any townsmen; or interested myself in the accomplishment of it. And I came not here to misrepresent this business, but to know what were the sentiments of the meeting.

I am firmly persuaded that, had the state of this town been properly considered, all attempts of this kind would have been put a stop to many years ago. But some gentlemen must have a *hobby-horse*, and will endeavour to make others ride it whether they can or not. It is hard, however, that the Poor must be obliged to it. But if we have the good fortune to unhorse them, it is hoped they will hereafter ride their hobby-horse at home, without disturbing the public, or cause us (who can be so happily and usefully employed in our own callings) not to neglect our business, to attend meetings when they are in humour to call them.

We must, no doubt, beside the loss of our time, expect a charge; and the 26th clause of this Bill

The amount of a Poor Book in Sheffield, in 1783, was about 400l. and seven books collected.—But in 1789 and 1790 a Poor Book, occasioned by increase of new inhabitants and new houses, amounted to 500l. and seven books collected. Of course, the assessments hitherto, without any additional burthen to the town, individually, have been found sufficient to relieve all the Poor; and the Poor (though the contrary has been asserted) have not increased above their proportion to the population of the town.

Bill now read, says, *the town shall pay for all.* I never saw a word of the bill before I came into this place; nor the abstract, till I just now borrowed it; nor did I know of one person that would be here. The decision of this meeting will make little difference to me, as my quota is small, yet I could rather wish that it was expended in purchasing liberty, than in building walls to immure our fellow-creatures, ^d and in creating unnecessary burthens.

It has been said, that "to be born poor was not a fault," but to *be* so in this view would, I think, be a misfortune. Never mind --- if you now receive evil things, it will be your faults if one day ye are not comforted.

This abstract, though but a shadow of this bill which has been read, yet, I am told, when one of the Committee (a Layman) moved for it to be layed before the town, It was said to him, "What trouble?"

But was not the refusal of the Churchwardens and Overseers to sign a petition as well, as what was told them by *others* ^e sufficient proofs of dissatisfaction? They however, trusted unto the multitude of their strength, and I should not wonder if they reaped the reward of their confidence.

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^d To quit which, at their own pleasure, (says the author of Facts and Observations, p. 18) should by no means be allowed them.

^e As the bill was not approved of at the meeting, it was expected to have been heard no more on. *Vide Appendix—Letters, No. 1. & 2.*

The manufactures of this town are, according to the old song,

“Knives, Scissors, Sheers, and Razors to Grind,”
and which we excel in.

The staple manufacture of the country about Shrewsbury, which it is proposed we shall imitate, is Welch flannels, in which men and women who are brought up in industry, are early instructed.

But where shall we find persons in this town at an advanced age, who have been brought up in smithies, at the anvil, or grinding-stone, who can be capable of handling the distaff, or the square, or plying the loom to any profitable purpose?

A house of trade at Shrewsbury who have been wrote to by a gentleman, at the desire of the Committee, have indeed given it as their opinion that if any manufacture is attempted in the proposed Workhouse at Sheffield, it should be the manufacture of the town.

But when have we a good workman in the town that wants work? Or who that can maintain his family out of the House, will chuse to go into it?---The officers by this bill, if it passed into a law, have great power, without a warrant, to go into the highways and hedges, and compel the Poor in general, and even VAGRANTS, to come into this House, that it may be filled. But I hope the prudent mechanic will still endeavour to want no relief but his own earnings; and by diligence in the day, be enabled to enjoy the blessed comforts of his family by his own fire-side,

sive, and preserve the precious liberty of pursuing an occupation that he is acquainted with.

One great objection with me to the erection of a Parish-Workhouse in a manufacturing view, is, that idle, drunken, and dissipated persons, who are known to be slothful, and have nothing but their labour to support themselves and families, should, upon asking parish relief, be compelled to work in well-regulated houses of correction; except in cases of sickness, age, or incapacity. Besides, before the advocates for the manufactorial scheme attempt to burthen the town with a New Workhouse, they ought, like Government, to order *a review*, and class the out-pensioners; see how many are fit for service, and how many are incapable from age, sickness, and infirmity; how many mothers with deserted families; how many are orphans, whose fathers probably fell in defence of their country, or are still serving it. In this respect they might soon be satisfied could they be prevailed with to visit the vestry-room at the Workhouse on Fridays, when the objects of distress receive their pittance. They would not then think of confining them within the walls of a Workhouse, which they must not be suffered to quit, and of thus converting it into little better than a prison.

Where is the use or humanity of thus confining persons in years, who are incapable of labour? when their life is but sorrow and trouble, and they ought to be at liberty to attend the House of God. Indeed, of whom now does a principal
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part of the weekly congregation in our church consist, but of these poor brethren?---Therefore to deprive them of this comfort would be adding to cruelty; and they would probably cry out, "We had rather be *door-keepers* in the House of God than *feast* in Houses where no instructor comes to lead us on our way." f

Besides, how great a number are there who now crawl to the present House for their pittance, who would scarcely be able to reach the other in its proposed situation!

Another objection (which I apprehend has a majority of the inhabitants in its favour) is, that the present Workhouse is capable of being enlarged, with lodging-rooms and other apartments adapted to the employment of all the Poor that ought to be taken into it, for about 500l. which would preclude the necessity of laying any burthen upon the town, or of creating one additional officer.

And now to consider the printed Abstracts of the Bill which has been read.

The Preamble, stating that the situation of the present Workhouse is bad, is not true.

The 1st Clause is an attempt to deprive every man of his right.

In answer to the 10th. However some may represent the present scheme as dictated by Humanity.

f At a former meeting I heard a gentleman say "that he expected, from reading an account of the dreadful situation of the Poor in the Workhouse in their dying moments, that some of the Clergy who had attended them would have given a personal report. But, upon enquiry, he found that none of them had been called in there."

manity---yet the building and furnishing great Houses, with large establishments, is often a serious evil, and productive of the worst consequences. In order to prove that this is no fanciful supposition, let us take a view of the circumstances which will probably attend the proposed Institution.

The expence of obtaining the Act---The purchase of the tenant-right of the gardens where the proposed Building is intended to be erected---The yearly ground rent of two or three acres, at 1d. per yard---The erection of the House of Industry, according to the plan and estimate on the table, is 6,500l.; and when did we hear of a public building done for less than the estimate?---Furnishing the House---Implements for manufactories. Treasurer, Steward, Governor, Matron, Physician, Surgeons, Apothecaries, &c. Several Superintendants of Work. Clerk---who I suppose is to be an attorney---and what will he do for a penny? ⁸ A Chaplain, certainly --- he cannot work without pay, and we are sure the others will not. So that we may expect should this expensive scheme go forward on so large a plan, as this bill sets forth, instead of being relieved in the article of assessments, stand a chance of being loaded yearly with three additional Poor Books.

The 11th Clause is complicated, and renders the directors absolute.

The 15th ought to be limited under 60 years.

The

^g I alluded when I spoke this *only* to the frequent verdicts given there of One Penny damages.

The 18th is suspicious, --- byelaws we have had enough of.

The 26th directs all expences to be paid out of the rates;

The 29th impowers the directors to enclose out of the ground purchased for the building a part of it for burying the dead. Then must these people expect to be buried with their relatives?

Mr. Pennant in his London, says, " In passing the church of St. Giles's in the Fields, I have observed with horror, a great square pit with many rows of coffins piled one upon the other, all exposed to sight or smell, some of the piles were incomplete, expecting the mortality of the night. I turned away disgusted at the view and scandalized at the want of police which so little regards the health of the living as to permit so many putrid corpses tacked between some slight boards, dispersing their dangerous effluvia over the capital.

The 36th and 66th arbitrary indeed. An officer may go into a house, and compel any person, reported to be poor, to come into this House and work, whether he can or not; and Vagrants, who chance to be found here (though at present passed away) must be kept to hard labour 12 months ---none who enter it, I suppose, will be suffered to quit it in less time. No Lazarus will be permitted to ask a crumb; the Poor, if they drop one complaint, will be no longer safe under their own vine—but can be compelled to go into this place.

What inducement does this Bill hold out to young

young men to enter into Sick Clubs ? When after a life of labour in support of themselves and families, they must, upon the failure of their clubs, or through a weight of poverty, be forced at an advanced age into the Workhouse, should the directors refuse them the poor pittance of perhaps one shilling per week.

What these men have done is to be no longer remembered to their advantage ; notwithstanding through a long life they have endeavoured and contributed a double portion, for whilst they laid by a provision, which they looked up to as a support in sickness and old age, they worked daily contributing to the maintenance of others, in paying their portion of the parish assessments. At present indeed, the members of such institutions seldom ask for parochial relief ; and, in general, are not allowed to do it without a note from the master of the club to the overseers. But as it is well known, alas ! that many have survived their clubs, or, through long sickness, have been reduced to half pay, which was inadequate to the maintenance of their families, --- what a discouragement must it be to such institutions that persons thus circumstanced are to have no resource in their distress, but in the sacrifice of their liberty !

But, if a regard is to be paid to oeconomy, consider upon what terms the people in the Workhouse are cloathed and maintained. Does not each of them cost near 3s. 6d. a week ? whilst the poor relieved out of doors do not each, on an average, receive one third.

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The number of families in this town who are out-pensioners are about 500, and, one with another, may be reckoned at three in a family. The weekly pension bill is under 50l.---But compel them to come into the house, and how great would be the amount!

The whole annual expence of Sheffield Poor is but 3500l. whilst Birmingham I am told in 1789 was 15,636l. 9s. od.

39 above the age of sixty.

55 above the age of 21, and under 60; such as are able being employed in useful domestic business, in cloathing the poor, and nursing the infirm both within and without doors.

20 above the age of 10, and under 21, employed at the cotton-works.

24 under the age of 10

So that there are not more persons in the House, capable of giving assistance, than are necessary.

233 Out-Pensioners above the age of 60;

239 under the age of 60;

21 under 21 and above 10, who are infirm;

308 under 7 years, including Bastards.

54 Children at Nurse.

38th Clause states that the Children shall continue in the House till the age of 14.

Children of industrious peasants may be seen earning their bread at seven, working daily, the boys with their fathers, and the girls with their mothers.

mothers. I know several who have, and now do earn it from six years old—the boys in driving the plough, and the girls in attending infants.

43d Clause states that it may be lawful for the Directors to borrow at interest any sum, not exceeding 5000l. When, lo! the estimate on the table is 6500l. for the building only!!! What can this clause be calculated for? is it to amuse the town? What is to defray the expence of obtaining the Act---of getting possession of the ground---the furnishing the house---the purchase of implements for manufactures---materials---and paying for some more than useful establishments of Officers? But the

47th Clause gives a power to borrow a farther sum of 3000l. and the

50th gives an unlimited power to the Directors. In order to raise an adequate fund to enable the Corporation to carry into execution the purposes of the Act, the said Directors may fix and ascertain from time to time such sums of money as shall be needful to be raised: and the said Churchwardens and Overseers are requested to collect the rates and pay the sums wanted to the Treasurer.

Then again the 54th Clause gives a power to Parish Officers “to raise money for any payment required by law,” besides the sum required by this Act.

Why did they not come forward at first with a probable sum? And why did not those Clauses 43, 47, 50, 54. immediately follow each other in common business.

Was their power meant to be limited? And after laying out enormous sums, our building, like the buildings at Somerset-house, would yet want further money to finish it.

Had they struck at the root of the evil, they had merited thanks. But they stain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

About the middle of winter an advertisement was published to discharge all persons from bringing milk to sell after nine o'clock on Sunday mornings (tho' many come eight miles). But too frequently on the Lord's day towards evening many of our public houses^h which seem to increase annually, are seen with company --- a cold joint of meat gratis set on the side board in some houses for their customers--- and late in the evening some so drunk that they cannot find the door posts to go out at. It frequently happens that many of these sabbath breakers^g are sued the week after for their Sunday ale scores; (one third of the actions brought into the Sheffield Court Baron, it is confidently said are for *ale*; the number of actions entered during a period of four years from Jan. 1st, 1787, to Dec. 31st, 1790 were 12915.) The consequences and effects that must result from such conduct are a prison, and a forlorn family chargeable to the town.

^h In Sheffield are 395 alehouses, exclusive of those who sell spirituous liquors only.

^g It was an observation of that great and good man Sir Matthew Hale, that according to the manner he spent the Sabbath, so he prospered the week after; and I think the glaring instances referred to above, are striking proofs of the great truth of his observation.

I now conclude with declaring my disapprobation of this Bill; but before the question is put I should wish to hear what arguments the gentlemen on the other side have to offer in favor of it as it will afford me an opportunity to reply, if necessary. If the freedom with which my sentiments are delivered should displease any man or set of men, it will hurt me much. I mean no offence; what I have said the subject demands, being of great importance, and in which every inhabitant of this populous town is materially interested.



APPENDIX.

(new Answer.)

LETTERS.

No. I.

Sir,

The favor of your attendance is requested at the Cutler's Hall on Saturday next, at ten o'clock in the forenoon, for the purpose of holding a conference with the Committee appointed for carrying into effect the Resolutions passed at a public Meeting for the erection of a new Workhouse, and the better maintenance and employment of the Poor.

Sheffield, 14th April, 1791.

Mr. William Ward.

No. II.

(Mr. WARD's Answer.)

Mr. Ward's Compliments. Having received an invitation to attend at the Cutlers Hall this morning, at ten o'clock, "for the purpose of holding a conference with a Committee appointed for carrying into effect the Resolutions passed for the erection of a New Workhouse," takes the liberty to say that he conceives the power of the Committee was sufficiently annihilated by the Resolutions of the last Public Meeting of the inhabitants of the town; and that it is unnecessary to hold conference with any other Committee, not authorized by the inhabitants at large: more especially, as it has already been declared, by the Churchwarden and Overseers of the Poor, and other inhabitants, at a Vestry Meeting yesterday, that the authority of the last Committee was entirely done away at the last general meeting of the inhabitants at the Town-Hall on 6th April inst.--To meet any of them as Townsmen, has always been a pleasure to Mr. Ward.

Saturday Morning, April 16.

